1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

are available, then try for the best explanation knowing that new facts will very probably force a change in the historical picture you have created to best explain the facts. The greater the number of facts, the fewer the possible number of different historical interpretations that can be applied to any particular case. With these rules in mind let us examine briefly what facts are at hand to help us with Kanuri origins.

First of all we have the Kanuri legends themselves which state that they came originally from Yemen—a legend they share with most of the Muslim people of the western Sudan. Let us call this the local theory and come back to it after considering other available facts. Subsistence farming and cattle keeping came into the area of the central and western Sahara about 5000 years ago, as evidenced by a number of archaeological sites in the area. At that time the Tibesti region north of Lake Chad was much wetter and the lake itself was enormous. It stretched well into the Sahara desert, especially into a region just south of the Tibesti known as the Bodele depression, which even today is well below the present level of Lake Chad itself. People settled in this region and utilized both domesticated plants and animals for their basic means of subsistence. Since that time, however, there has been a steady desiccation of the central Sahara which has dried up the Tibesti and the Bodele depression while the water has retreated in a southwesterly direction towards the present site of Lake Chad. As late as 500 B.C. merchants from Carthage were voyaging to the Tibesti to trade with people who lived in a wet climate among crocodiles, hippopotami, and giraffes.[1] Certainly what evidence we have suggests a very ancient trade between the people of the entire Sahara and those of North Africa. This was much expanded by the introduction of the camel sometime in the first or second century A.D. which facilitated trade across much drier portions of desert and over much longer distances. If we add to this evidence the fact that the Kanuri language is related to the central Saharan group of languages—and these are as a group only very distantly related to all other African language families—then a picture or at least a theory begins to emerge.

The Neolithic agriculturalists in the southern Sahara were drawn further south between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D. as the waters of the desert began to recede southward.[2] As they moved southward they pulled the Saharan trade with them, and competition among groups in the Chad basin produced some differences in power and recognized status among clans who lived in the area. Leading lineages within these clans began to unite to govern the activities of clan members until finally the various clans formed loose federations with a leading clan and its leading lineage as the royal or kingly one.[3]

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[1] See Rhys Carpenter, "A Trans-Saharan Caravan Route in Herodotus," *Journal of American Archaeology*, Vol. 60, 1956, pp. 231–42.

[2] This process was also occurring in another area of "desert capture," the upper Niger bend where desert wet regions north of the river receded towards the south. The Niger itself bends into the Sahara, because like the Chad basin there are lowlands to the north of the great bend. Thus it is no accident that the Chad basin and the upper Niger bend have witnessed some of the earliest developments of centralized states in the western Sudan—they were the two areas into which the people of the desert could most naturally and easily move as desiccation proceeded.

[3] In his book on Bunyoro, John Beattie very concisely defines a lineage as "all the descendants in one line (that is, either through males only or through females only) of a particular person through a specified number of generations. It differs from a *clan* in that while usually all the

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173 Given the fact that very many of the Muslim peoples of West Africa have legends concerning their origins in the Near East and often more specifically in Yemen, we can, I believe, think of the local origin theory as a mythical genesis story that is part of a widespread cultural heritage of the Muslim people of West
174 Africa, likening it in this way to western stories about the Garden of Eden. On the other hand we do have "hard" linguistic evidence that the Kanuri people are related to peoples of the central Sahara northeast of Bornu. We also have very suggestive evidence from the geographic history that relates the people speaking these languages to one another and gives us grounds for positing immigration into the Chad basin and an increasing population density in the area. The exact details of this theory are matters for future research, but the major conclusion which places the origin of the Kanuri in the central Sahara seems to be a valid one.

At any rate, by the end of the first millennium A.D. the Muslim world outside the Sudan knew of the existence of Kanem, a sovereign state due south of Tripoli on the southern rim of the Sahara. Local traditions associated with the king lists (these have been collected periodically since 1850) assert that Islam came at least to the rulers of Kanem in the eleventh century. According to the traditions an eleventh-century Mai or king is supposed to have died in Egypt on his
175 way to Mecca. Certainly by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Kanem became a well-known state in the Islamic world. Trans-Saharan commerce was completely controlled, garrisons were built to protect the trade routes, and treaty relations were established with the Hafsid rulers of Tunis. In the mid-thirteenth century a travelers' house for Kanem pilgrims was constructed in Cairo so that they might have proper accommodation while on the long journey to Mecca via Egypt. At the other extreme of the Islamic world, in Spain, a poet from Kanem was renowned in the court of El Mansur (1190–1214 A.D.) in Seville for his praise songs of the Sultan. This was a great period of Islamic civilization and Kanem played its part in that florescence.

175 From the mid-thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century a period of
648 dark ages befell the kingdom. This is sometimes referred to as "the time of troubles." The dynastic chronicles indicate this period by including a great many rulers all holding sway for very short periods. The kingdom seems to have become a tempestuous stage for civil wars within and continuous attack from without. A letter to Cairo from this period has turned up, sent by a Kanem ruler, asking that the Caliph of Egypt send word to Sudanese Arabs who were helping Wadai to the east of Kanem raid amongst the people of Kanem for slaves even though such actions are considered to be against the precepts of Islam, since one must not raid for slaves amongst other Muslim peoples.[4] The main source of trouble is supposed to have come from one particular group—the Bulala. These people were either an allied subordinate tribe or a clan whose leading lineage had split off from the Kanem royal line and had then grown in its independence and power until its leaders challenged the Kanem control of the kingdom.

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members of a lineage know exactly how they are related to all the other members of it, and together, they often form a corporate group, clan members may not be able to trace genealogical links with other clan members, and often clansfolk are widely dispersed." See John Beattie, *Bunyoro: An African Kingdom*, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 3.

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[4] See R. H. Palmer, *Bornu, Sahara, and Sudan*, (London: John Murray, 1936), p. 195.

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ble, and these men maintained Bornu at an apogee of greatness until well into the seventeenth century. One of these rulers, Idris Alooma, had a court scribe at the beginning of the seventeenth century, who wrote a number of accounts of his royal master's military expeditions. Luckily these have survived to give us a picture of Bornu warfare and government in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was during this period, too, that Bornu was first mentioned on European maps, and from this time forward its fame became part of the legends of unknown kingdoms that lay inside the unexplored interior of Africa.

Bornu traditions claim that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a decline in the power of the state. This is explained by the claim that the monarchy was becoming weak and overburdened with pomp, rituals, and religious study by the monarch. The ruling Mai appeared in public in a *fanadir*, or cage, which only his most trusted servants could approach and rarely led military expeditions himself. Much of this may be a reinterpretation of Bornu history by the second dynasty and their followers, who would naturally have played up the failures of the previous regime, when they took over in the nineteenth century. Contrarily there are traditions of many successful military campaigns during this period and Bornu's reputation as a great kingdom was still very widespread. Thus a wandering Englishman, Richard Tulley, who visited Tripoli at the end of the eighteenth century, spoke glowingly of what he had heard of Bornu's power. Parenthetically, he claimed that one of the Kanuri noblewomen living in Tripoli could speak the Italian language fluently.[6] On the other side of the case, Tuareg and Tubu raiders attacked the northern boundaries of Bornu and harassed the caravans with greater intensity than before.

The activities of these raiders are said to have increased during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it is important to realize that the entire southern Sahara was a hotbed of unrest during this two hundred year period. In the 1590s the armies of El Mansur of Morocco finally managed to cross the Sahara and destroy the great empire of Songhai. Its cities of Timbuctu and Gau never again became the great emporia of trade, politics, and learning they had once been. The Moroccans could not establish, so far from home, any stable administrative organization capable of replacing the one they had destroyed. This suddenly released vassal groups in the Sahara, many of whom bordered on Bornu, and these were now free to raid, stimulate revolts, and pillage caravans, while their cousins to the west fought over the remains of the Songhai empire and the control of western trade routes across the Sahara. It was during this same period of unrest that, all across the Sudan, wandering holy men, especially nomadic Fulani of Futa Djallon in Guinea, in Masina in the Upper Niger, and even in present day Nigeria, were expressing this disorder in religious terms. They preached through their leaders for a return to a truer and purer form of Islam. Often they claimed that those round them were pagans and had to be subdued in a holy war to reestablish Muslim order and law. It is in the light of all this turbulence that the so-called decline of Bornu in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be seen. Elsewhere empires were tottered or being formed, as in Futa Djallon; but Bornu remained, shaken perhaps by the general unrest of the period but still it survived, controlled its trade routes,

[6] R. Tulley, *Letters Written During a Ten Years' Residence at the Court of Tripoli*, Vol. II, (London: 1819), p. 51.

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Recommended Reading

General Reading on the Culture Area

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HODGKIN, T. L., 1960, *Nigerian Perspectives; An Historical Anthology.* London: Oxford University Press.

A useful introduction to many of the historical writings on Nigerian societies, especially the northern emirates. The author also synthesizes the material into a general historical summary of the western Sudan.

HOGBEN, S. J., 1930, *The Muhammadan Emirates of Northern Nigeria.* London: Oxford University Press.

Brief summaries of the emirates of northern Nigeria and their place in the history of the western Sudan.

HOPEN, C. E., 1958, *The Pastoral Fulbe Family in Gwandu.* London: Oxford University Press.

A general account of Fulani family life in a semi-sedentary population to the west of Bornu.

MEEK, C. K., 1925, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria.* London: Oxford University Press.

A most comprehensive description of the range of cultures to be found in northern Nigeria.

NADEL, S. F., 1946, *A Black Byzantium.* London: Oxford University Press.

A detailed description and analysis of the Nupe emirate to the west of Bornu which was more recently Islamized and has many interesting similiarities and differences to the social and political system of Bornu. This author has also published a book on Nupe religion.

SMITH, M. F., 1955, *Baba of Karo, A Woman of the Muslim Hausa.* London: Faber and Faber; New York: Praeger, 1964.

The life story of a woman of northern Nigeria giving sensitive insight into the women's position in this area as it is, and was, during the last sixty years.

SMITH, M. G., 1960, *Government in Zazzau, 1800–1950.* London: Oxford University Press.

A detailed historical and social anthropological analysis of the emirate system of government as it has spanned the last century and a half in Hausaland. The author has also written extensively on local economic life among the Hausa in Zaria Province.

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• 113 STENNING, D. J., 1959, *Savannah Nomads.* London: Oxford University Press.
An excellent report on the social life of the Fulani semi-sedentary nomads of Bornu and the way in which they relate to the way of life of the settled Kanuri.

TRIMINGHAM, H. S., 1959, *Islam in West Africa.* London: Oxford University Press.
A detailed working out of the way in which Islam has been received in West Africa and the changes it has effected in the area.

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BARTH, H., 1857, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa.* London: Longmans, 5 vols.
A detailed description of Bornu and the western Sudan in the 1850s by one of the most painstaking observers and explorers of nineteenth century Africa. This work also includes the first published account in English of Bornu history.

BENTON, P. A., 1913, *The Sultanate of Bornu; Translated From the German of Dr. A. Schultze with Additions and Appendices.* London: Oxford University Press.
One of the few earlier works that describes the culture of the Kanuri, although rather briefly and unsystematically. There are also a number of interesting documents added by Benton that deal with the beginnings of the second dynasty in the early nineteenth century.

BOAHEN, A. A., 1964, *Britain, the Sahara, and the Western Sudan, 1788–1861.* Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
An account by an acute historical observer of the effects of British influence in an early period of western Sudanic history.

COHEN, R., 1961, "Marriage Instability Among the Kanuri of Northern Nigeria," *American Anthropologist,* Vol. 63, 1231–1249.
An analysis of the factors causing high divorce among the Kanuri.

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A summary and analysis of the problems associated with the role of the district head in Bornu.

———, 1965, "Institutionalized Exchange: A Kanuri Example," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines,* Vol. 5, 353–369.
A discussion of traditional Kanuri concepts of money and their relation to the social system, especially superior-subordinate relationships.

———, 1966, "The Dynamics of Feudalism in Bornu," *Boston University Publications on Africa,* Vol. 2, *African History,* Butler, Jeffrey (ed.), 87-105.
An attempt to analyze the longevity of Kanuri political institutions and explain their durability in comparison to feudal forms of government elsewhere.

———, 1966, *"From Empire to Colony: Bornu in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in* Turner, V. (ed.) *The Impact of Colonialism,* Stanford: Hoover Institute, (in press).
An historical account of the political system of nineteenth century Bornu and

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the exact nature of the changes made in the system when it came under colonial rule.

DENHAM, (Major), and (Captain) CLAPPERTON, 1826, *Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa.* London: Murray, 2 vols.

A very good account of life in Bornu at the beginning of the nineteenth century just as the second dynasty was taking power.

PALMER, R. H., 1928, *Sudanese Memoirs.* Lagos, Nigeria: Government Printer, 3 vols.

These volumes contain most of the writings that have survived of the Imam, Ahmed Ibn Fartua, a scribe in the court of the sixteenth century monarch, Idris Alooma. They depict the military life primarily but provide invaluable insights into the social and political life of this early period.

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This is a strange, erudite book that goes over Kanuri history in detail and attempts to tie it into the classical world and that of ancient Egypt.

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ROSMAN, A., 1959, "Social Structure and Acculturation among the Kanuri of Bornu Province, Northern Nigeria," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences,* Ser. II, Vol. 21, 620–630.

A summary of Dr. Rosman's work in Bornu on the problem of social stratification and differential culture change.

URVOY, Y., 1949, *Histoire de l'Empire du Bornou.* Memoires de l'Instut Francais d'Afrique Noire, Vol. 7, Paris: Librarie Larose.

The most complete account of Bornu history available, although the author's ideas about the origin of the kingdom and the nature of its development need revision in the light of social anthropological research.

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128 is shown how these link together to form the segmentation of society into a two class system. Along with this description, changes and potential changes in the status system are pointed out. Political organization is then discussed from the point of view of the distribution of power and authority throughout the society as a whole. Changes produced by colonialism and Western contact in general are described and the adjustments to these are analyzed.

Finally, the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services in a changing culture are discussed and analyzed in order to show how the standard of living is related to the operation of Kanuri social structure. In addition, the distributive system is shown to be intimately related to other forms of social organization in the society as a whole.

The last chapter summarizes the findings and gives an analysis of the changes occurring in the Borno today. This allows for a tentative statement concerning the future of the present social structure.

104 In the typed text, the letter ɔ is the phonetic ɔ and is pronounced as the oo in look or cook.

• 113 References to anthropological journals are as follows:

AA - American Anthropologist

SWJ - Southwest Journal of Anthropology

JRAI - Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute

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own farm plot. This added to the general impression of the fertilizer as an intrusive item, and one which had no practical value under local conditions.

Conclusion

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The human side of innovation has often been emphasized as being just as important as the technological. The Magumeri experience reiterates the fact that the social and psychological context of innovation requires careful analysis so that variables affecting innovation may be isolated and prepared for before any development programmes are put into action. If the place of social relations, as compared to technology, in farm production had been taken into account, the results of this experiment might well have been less disappointing. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that all technology is imbedded in a welter of cultural accretions. It is the responsibility of the innovator to isolate cultural characteristics of technology which are necessary to its successfull operation, from those which are simply there because of the cultural origins of the item. This is what lies at the root of flexibility as opposed to rigidity in the introduction of western technology to the underdeveloped areas of the world.

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